

## THOMAS DAVIES (c. 1806-1878)

By Paul Gettys

Thomas Davies was born in England between 1806 and 1810. His birth date is estimated from the U. S. Census reports for 1850, 1860, and 1870. We do not know at this time when he came to the United States and how he came to be living in Yorkville, a small town in South Carolina.

By about 1845, Davies was living in Yorkville and was operating a bar room. He purchased a slave who eventually adopted the name Nelson Davies. The obituary for Nelson Davies, published in 1901, states that he was being transported through Yorkville with a group of slaves bound for the western states. Thomas Davies found the young Nelson in this group and purchased him to serve as a tapster in his bar room. It is estimated that Nelson was about 12 years old at the time. Working for Thomas Davies, the young boy eventually learned to read and write. Thomas recognized Nelson's talent for drawing and working with his hands, and secured the services of John Curry, a recognized house painter, to train Nelson, who would go on to be a master of the art of faux-painting.<sup>1</sup>

About 1846, Thomas married Mary Louise Dennis, the daughter of Capt. Reuben Dennis (1784-1871) and granddaughter of John Dennis (1757-1851), a Revolutionary War veteran. The couple had six daughters.<sup>2</sup> Shortly after the marriage, probably between 1846 and 1848, the couple bought the house at 103 North Congress Street in Yorkville, today known as the Herndon House. Located at the corner of North Congress Street and Madison Street, this house was built about 1826-1828 for Col. William C. Beatty, probably by the local builder Thomas B. Hoover.<sup>3</sup>

The 1850 U. S. Census describes Thomas as a shop keeper with real estate valued at \$6,000. His wife, Mary, was described as being 30 years old, substantially younger than Thomas. By this time, two daughters had been born, Ann, age 4 and Martha, age 2.

In 1856 Thomas Davies advertised for a new business, Thomas Davies & Co. "at the stand formerly occupied by S. N. Stowe & Co. and L. P. Sadler & Co. nearly opposite the Walkers Hotel." The business was a grocery and offered provisions of all kinds. He advertised that he would receive country produce in barter and will make liberal bids for cotton. The same paper

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<sup>1</sup> *Yorkville Enquirer*, February 27, 1901.

<sup>2</sup> William Boyce White, *The Genesis of York*, York, S. C.: Yorkville Historical Society, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> White.

contained small ads for Thomas Davies & Co. for flour, molasses, mackerel, cheese, and other goods.<sup>4</sup>

The 1860 U. S. Census describes his occupation as a Farmer. It is not clear if Davies was still operating the grocery business, but he evidently was farming. He has real estate worth \$17,000 and personal property worth \$4,000. He now has six daughters. Daughters born since the 1850 Census include Mary, Jane, Harriett, and Dorcus. The real estate value assigned to Thomas would likely indicate that he had purchased land for his farming occupation. The personal property value would indicate that he probably had some slaves, perhaps to include Nelson Davies.

In 1861, a public notice appeared for the auction of property in the case of George Steele vs. J. P. Aycock. Steele is foreclosing on Aycock for failure to pay the mortgage on a property described as “House and lot adjoining lots of John H. Adams and B. F. Briggs, formerly known as the Thomas Davies lot, but now occupied by the defendant.” The lot is described as being on Main Street [Congress Street] and having a neat and commodious dwelling house and one of the best business stands in the Town of Yorkville.<sup>5</sup> This seems likely to be the former Thomas Davies & Co. building, further indicating that Davies had left the grocery business.

During the midst of the Civil War, in 1863, a notice appeared in the newspaper: “The undersigned Thomas Davies offers for sale his very valuable house and lot situated on Congress Street in Yorkville. The house contains six rooms with a fireplace in each. The outbuildings consist of servant houses, cook kitchen, meat house, lumber house, carriage house, and corn crib and are nearly new, having been recently erected. The lot is well supplied with a well of excellent water and is the most desirable in Yorkville.”<sup>6</sup> William B. White, in *The Genesis of York*, states that the house was purchased by Joseph Herndon. This would indicate that Davies and his family moved to his farm east of York when the house was sold.

During the turbulent aftermath of the Civil War, Thomas Davies was one of many who declared bankruptcy. “The U. S. Court in Columbia granted petition of creditors of Thomas Davies to have him declared bankrupt. The case is referred to W. J. Clawson, Esq., Registrar in bankruptcy for the Fourth Congressional District.”<sup>7</sup> The bankruptcy sale was scheduled for the first Monday in March 1868 at the York County Court House. Listed for sale from the property of Thomas Davies were: 1) Plantation of 690 acres where he now lives on both sides of the Land’s Ford Road, three miles from Yorkville, bounded by G. W. Williams, Esq., George Steele, the estate of I. D. Witherspoon, Clark Robinson, and others; 2) Tract of 9 ¾ acres on the Charlotte Road near Yorkville, bounded by Mrs. O’Leary, Eliza Johnson, Leander Dobson, and others; 3) Notes and

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<sup>4</sup> *Yorkville Enquirer*, February 21, 1856.

<sup>5</sup> *Yorkville Enquirer*, October 3, 1861.

<sup>6</sup> *Yorkville Enquirer*, March 11, 1863.

<sup>7</sup> *Charleston Daily News*, December 24, 1867.

book accounts; 4) Three shares of King's Mountain Rail Road stock; 5) Personal property to include one silver watch, one horse, one colt, two cows, one bull, one boar, one cotton gin and band, one hay cutter, one old wagon, one flute, one violin, and a lot of old molasses boilers. The assignees are T. S. Jeffries and W. B. Metts.<sup>8</sup>

Within two years, we find Thomas Davies was back in Yorkville and back in business. The 1870 U. S. Census describes him as "Proprietor of a Hotel" with personal property worth \$300. In the household are his wife, six daughters, and two African American servants. The hotel is the Davies House.

In a notice in the newspaper in 1875, Davies is described as the proprietor of the "Davies House," a hotel. Due to recently passed Civil Rights legislation, he and J. M. Rawlinson, another hotelier, changed the name of their businesses. "J. M. Rawlinson, proprietor of Rawlinson's Hotel and Mr. Thomas Davies, proprietor of the Davies House, give notice that from this date their houses will be closed as regular hotels or inns. They will hereafter be conducted as private boarding houses for the accommodation of local or transient custom. This is deemed necessary in consequence of the civil rights bill."<sup>9</sup>

Davies died in 1878. The short notice stated: "Died in Yorkville on Saturday night, September 14, Mr. Thomas Davies, aged about 73 years."<sup>10</sup> To date, I have not found information on his burial or any additional information on his wife or daughters.

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<sup>8</sup> *Yorkville Enquirer*, February 13, 1868.

<sup>9</sup> *Yorkville Enquirer*, March 11, 1875.

<sup>10</sup> *Yorkville Enquirer*, September 19, 1878.